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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000125

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, AF/PDPA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: PRESSURE MOUNTS FOR YAR'ADUA TO STEP ASIDE

REF: ABUJA 0109 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McNulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy
Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

EMINENT ELDERS CALL FOR POWER TRANSFER

¶1. (SBU) An Eminent Elders Group led by former Heads of State Alhaji Shehu Shagari, General Yakubu Gowon, and Chief Ernest Shonekan submitted letters to Senate President David Mark and House Speaker Dimeje Bankole January 28 demanding that President Yar'Adua hand over power formally to Vice President Jonathan, according to press reports and other contacts. Other group members, who caucused January 27 in Abuja, reportedly included former Vice President Alex Ekwueme, all three former Chief Justices of Nigeria (Justices Mohammed Uwais, Alfa Belgore, and Idris Kutigi), former Finance Minister Adamu Ciroma, ex Information Minister Jerry Gana, former Defense Minister and Army Chief Lieutenant General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, Niger Delta senior statesman Chief Edwin Clark, and former People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chairperson Solomon Lar.

REPRESENTATIVES JOIN SENATE COLLEAGUES IN CALLING FOR HAND OVER

¶2. (SBU) Similarly, some 200 members of the 360-member House of Representatives signed a letter calling upon President Yar'Adua to hand over power formally to his deputy, according to the press. Such action follows up a non-binding resolution unanimously approved by the Senate that called upon Vice President Jonathan to become Acting President (reftel).

MOST SENATORS PUSHING FOR REMOVAL

13. (C) Jonathan Mark, Special Assistant to (and son of) Senate President David Mark, told LabOff January 29 that 90 percent of Senators now want Yar'Adua removed because of what they perceive as a "leadership problem." To reverse the momentum, he said, Yar'Adua would have to prove he "is fit -- which everyone knows he is not." Pressure on Yar'Adua to go has transcended North-South considerations. He identified the holdout Yar'Adua loyalists as former Delta State Governor (and Yar'Adua 2007 campaign financier) James Ibori, Attorney General Michael Aaondoakaa, Principal Private Secretary David Edevbie, and first lady Turai Yar'Adua.

COMMENT

14. (C) The amorphous Eminent Elders Group has had various manifestations depending on the issue of the day, but this is the first time that we know of that General Gowon, one of the group's principal drivers, has included both Northern and Southern leaders in the line-up. Many observers agree that the pressure on Yar'Adua loyalists to cede real powers to Jonathan is growing, but they differ on the cause. Some say Jonathan has gained grudging respect

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from Northerners for the resolve he showed in dealing with the Jos violence, noting that Jonathan was welcomed in Jos in the immediate aftermath of the violence while Yar'Adua's motorcade was stoned by angry Fulanis when he visited Jos several months after the November 2008 violence. Some point to embarrassment over an obvious leadership vacuum, and others suggest that the civilian elites want to ensure that they do not leave any opening for military intervention. END COMMENT.
SANDERS